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The Spirit of Christmas

A Fantasy
In
Two Acts

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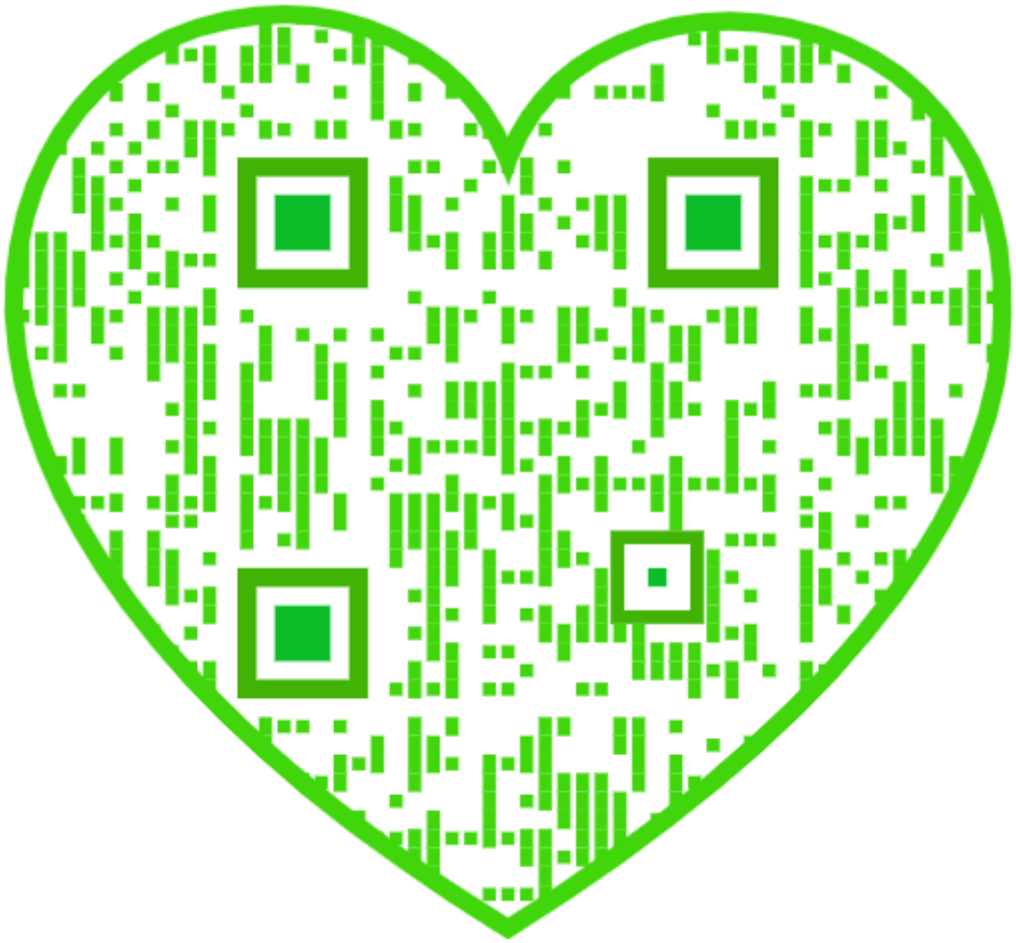

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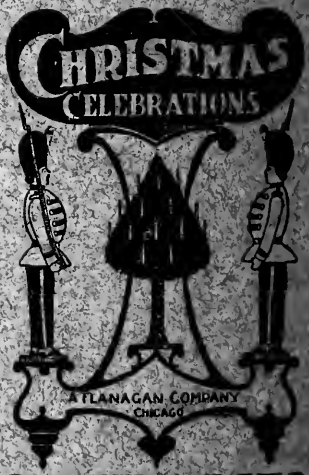

A. FLANAGAN COMPANY
CHICAGO

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

AN ORIGINAL FANTASY
IN
TWO SHORT ACTS

BY
MIRIAM WILSON

A. FLANAGAN COMPANY
CHICAGO

PS635
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CHARACTERS

In the order of their appearance

EMILY, *Mr. Chalmers' housekeeper*
MR. JOHN CHALMERS, *an elderly business man*
FATHER CHRISTMAS
SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS
MRS. JAMES BROWN
MR. JAMES BROWN
CHORUS OF CHILDREN
RAGGED GIRL

SYNOPSIS

SCENE I. *Room in Chalmers' House.* TIME: *Christmas Eve*

SCENE II. *Room in Brown's House.* TIME: *Evening of Christmas Day*

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NOV 23 1916

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no. 1

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

SCENE I

CHRISTMAS EVE: *Sitting room of* JOHN CHALMERS, *with bachelor comforts—table with bouquet of holly in center, easy chair, newspaper. Enter elderly, churlish-looking man with a business air; throws off coat, advancing towards chair he sees holly. Frowning impatiently, he snatches it from the jar and regards it for a second with great scorn. He is about to throw it in the fire, but jams it back in the jar instead. Settles himself comfortably in the chair and takes out cigar. He feels irritably in various pockets for a match. His first attempt to strike one is a failure and he flings it from him with a curse. He again settles himself comfortably in his chair and begins opening his paper. Two raps at the door and his housekeeper enters, hesitating.*

CHALMERS [*with a snap*]: Well, Emily, what d'ye want?

EMILY: Oh, sir, I've been waiting until you came in—I—I—haven't ordered the dinner for to-morrow yet, and—it's late.

CHALMERS [*testily*]: To-morrow's dinner! Why on earth should you worry me about to-morrow's dinner? I always leave that sort of thing to you, you know—and very well you manage it. I'll say that for you [*in a grudging tone*].

EMILY: Thank you, sir,—but to-morrow being Christmas day, I thought as you'd like——

CHALMERS [*explosively*]: Might like my grandmother. Emily [*thumping his fist on the table*] I'll have no Christmas feasting in my house! Why should I make a fool of myself, like a darned sheep, just because everybody else loses his wits? [*Working himself up*] Christmas is an antiquated farce; a piece of antediluvian tomfoolery; an outgrown superstition—good enough, perhaps, for children. Why, half the fools who

keep Christmas do so because their great grandmothers kept it—or, probably, because they are fond of a big feed and it may be about the only time they get it. They don't care a rap for its origin or what it stands for!

[FATHER CHRISTMAS *cautiously puts his head in around the door (or curtain), center back, and listens a minute, then withdraws.*]

CHALMERS [*continuing*]: The Spirit of Christmas is dead, I tell you, dead, and we won't rattle its dry bones in this house. No, Emily, [*subsiding*] to-morrow, with us, is Thursday, the twenty-fifth day of December, 1916, and we'll have our usual Thursday dinner!

[*Steps and voices are heard outside. Then children's voices singing, "Good King Wenceslas."*[1] *Both listen,* CHALMERS *obviously irritated. When the song is finished*——]

CHALMERS: Send 'em away! Send 'em away before they start again. I won't encourage them.

[EMILY *goes to the door. Shortly, they are heard shouting "Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas!"* EMILY *returns with a smile, which she quickly suppresses.*]

CHALMERS: What's that they say?

EMILY: They were wishing me a Merry Christmas.

CHALMERS: Noisy little devils. [*Suspiciously*] You didn't give them anything, did you?

EMILY [*shyly*]: Yes—I—did.

CHALMERS [*snorts angrily*]: Humph!

[EMILY *is leaving the room.*]

CHALMERS: I don't want to hurt your feelings, but these—eh—floral decorations don't appeal to me. Would you mind taking them with you?

EMILY [*snatching up vase and speaking with exasperation*]: Well, they'll look fine on the kitchen table; and it's a blessing your bite isn't as bad as your bark [*shutting the door with a bang*].

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[1] For carol and music see pages 15 and 16.

CHALMERS [*laughing gruffly*]: Ha, ha, ha! Now, I've raised her Ebenezer—but I can't have any Christmas nonsense in my house. I wonder if I can get a little peace now. [*He again prepares to settle comfortably when 'phone bell rings.*] Hello! Hello! Yes, this is Chalmers. Who? Who? Brown? Oh, Brown. Yes. Oh, thank you. To-morrow evening? All right. Yes, I'll come 'round. About eight o'clock? All right. Good night. [*Settles back in chair.*] I believe the Browns are the only sane family in town. There'll be no Christmas nonsense with them or they wouldn't have asked me. [*Reads newspaper for a minute, then aloud*] "We will conclude by wishing to our readers, young and old, rich and poor, a right 'Merry Christmas' and——" [*throws the paper down, all crumpled up.*] Even the confounded newspaper has caught the infection.

[*He takes off his spectacles and settles himself for a nap.* FATHER CHRISTMAS *peeps in, sees him asleep and enters, followed by* SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS.]

FATHER CHRISTMAS: This is the man I was speaking about. Doesn't he look a cheerful old boy? You know, there used to be some children in this house and I had forgotten they had removed. Just as I was coming in, I heard him say it,—"The Spirit of Christmas is dead, I tell you, the Spirit of Christmas is dead!"

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS [*softly, looking kindly at the sleeper*]: Poor old man! [*Chirpily*] Do you know, Father Christmas, I never felt so alive before as I do this year. More people than ever before are keeping me alive in their hearts. Thousands and thousands of houses welcome me so joyfully.

FATHER CHRISTMAS [*enthusiastically*]: And I'm feeling younger every year. I'm really awfully worried about it. I counted six red hairs in my beard yesterday and my figure is becoming less fathermotherly. I'm so afraid the children won't know me in a few more years at this rate.

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS: Cheer up, Daddy Christmas. They certainly won't know you with a sad face. [*She dances around,*

then pauses again in front of the sleeping man, puzzled.] How shall I treat this poor old fellow? I've been watching him for a long time, and he is getting quickly worse. It's a case of shrinkage of the heart and swelling of the purse. I put it into Mr. Brown's heart to ask him for to-morrow night. You know—the house where we left so many toys for their Christmas tree. They're having a lot of children for to-morrow night, but I'm afraid he's too far gone for that to make him happy.

FATHER CHRISTMAS: Well, my dear, we must be off. [*Pulling out large notebook*] I've still a million and sixty-two stockings to fill. It's a good thing I traded my reindeer team for a flying machine.

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS: And I've been working night and day for weeks [*dancing lightly around*] but it's not work that makes me weary. There are fewer poor children left without gifts this year than ever before. All the hospitals, I attended to weeks ago. But I would like this old man to help me before another year comes. . . . I wonder if we should make him feel the pinch of poverty again to bring some sympathy to his hard old soul. [FATHER CHRISTMAS *shakes his head.*] You remember it is only since he made some money that he began to get grouchy.

FATHER CHRISTMAS: It's his eyes that are wrong. [*Tenderly*] He isn't seeing right, poor fellow.

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS [*clapping her hands*]: That's it! That's it! [*She picks up his spectacles.*] His spectacles are wrong. [*She breathes on them three times and waves her wand.*] I believe we've done the trick, Daddy [*gleefully dancing*]. Come along, Father Christmas!

FATHER CHRISTMAS: Yes, indeed! I've a lot of emergency orders to attend to. I'm the hardest worked man in the land, but I don't object to overtime.

[*Both exit talking and laughing.*]

[CHALMERS, *waking, stretches, and yawns. Looks at his watch.*]

CHALMERS: By Jove! I've been sleeping. Well, I'll get to bed before those confounded Christmas bells begin. [*He puts on spectacles and picks up paper.*] Strange, how much better I feel for that little nap. The idea of Emily giving those noisy kids something out of her miserable wage! I wonder if she has gone to bed. [*He rings.*]

EMILY [*enters*]: Yes, sir!

CHALMERS: Er—Emily—eh—about to-morrow. If you—eh—want to make a fool of yourself, to-morrow, why, I don't want to stop you. I suppose you'd like to go to your home.

EMILY [*overwhelmed*]: Oh, sir! I was going to ask you, but——"

CHALMERS: Yes, yes—but—you thought I'd snap your head off—eh? Well, I shall be out, anyway, and you may as well enjoy yourself in your own way—and—eh—[*bashfully*] it's a long time since I gave you anything—here you are [*sheepishly*].

EMILY: Five dollars! [*Almost weeping*] Oh—sir——

CHALMERS [*testily and awkwardly*]: There, there! That'll do! That'll do!

EMILY [*going*]: Good night, sir,—and—[*as she reaches the door*] A Merry Christmas!

CHALMERS: Good night, Emily—and—same to you. . . . I certainly feel much better to-night. [*He picks up a bit of holly dropped on the floor and absently puts it in his buttonhole, yawns, goes to side table and lights his candle, yawning.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE II

EVENING OF CHRISTMAS DAY: *The Brown's house in festive mood. Christmas tree loaded.* SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS *discovered examining it.*

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS: Yes, this is a lovely tree. Each gift inspired by a loving thought.

[*Singing or reciting.*]

Nursed high on the mountain,
Fed with rain and mist and dew,
The warm sun the fountain
Of your strength and beauty, too.

Oft by the south winds kissed,
Whispering love from sunny seas,
Or by the north winds blest,
Bending boughs before the breeze.

The east winds came bringing,
Freezing limbs and snowy face;
The west winds came singing,
Lithe limbs bent again with grace.

Why, I feel quite sentimental and could rhyme by the yard——

Life's only worth while,
If you bring a smile
To the cheek of all whom we meet,
And all their great riches
Will land them in ditches,
If the friends whom they meet get cold feet.

[*Laughing*] Ha—here come my friends! I am invisible, but they can always feel my presence.

[*Enter* MR. BROWN *followed by* MRS. BROWN.]

MRS. BROWN: Just a last look, to see that everything is all right. How happy all the kiddies are.

MR. BROWN: Yes, and how happy you are, too, to see them so.

MRS. BROWN [*laughing*]: Of course, I am. I could just dance round the tree, myself. It's the SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS I can feel in the air.

[SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS, *slowly retiring to center back, waving her wand, smilingly disappears behind curtain, while* MRS. BROWN *goes to piano and sings, spontaneously, a couple of verses—stopping suddenly.*]

MRS. BROWN: Oh, you *did* 'phone Mr. Chalmers, didn't you?

MR. BROWN [*chuckling*]: Yes, the old boy sounded rather grouchy about it, but he said he would come around.

CHILDREN [*calling outside the door*]: May we come in?

MR. BROWN: Yes. Come along.

MRS. BROWN: Come in, now.

[CHILDREN *pour in with shouts and exclamations.*]

FIRST LITTLE GIRL: Oh, isn't that the loveliest, loveliest tree?

FIRST LITTLE BOY: Oh, I see a drum. I wonder if Father Christmas sent that to me.

MR. BROWN: Listen, children. I've got a great surprise for you!

MRS. BROWN: A most wonderful surprise.

MR. BROWN [*slowly and solemnly*]: Father Christmas is coming here, to-night.

SECOND LITTLE GIRL [*anxiously*]: You don't mean his very, very own self?

MR. BROWN: Yes. His very own self. You know he chooses one house each year where he takes off his invisible cloak and meets some of the children whom he loves. Well, this year, he sent a message that he would come here.

CHILDREN [*gasp*]: { Oh! / Oh, my! / Oh, how jolly! }

MRS. BROWN: My only worry is, how are we to greet him? [*Anxiously*] I've looked in all the etiquette books I could find, but they don't seem to include him. He's neither among The Church Dignitaries nor the Officers of State, nor Royal Family. I even looked up Civil Servants, but he wasn't there! Do you think [*to* MR. BROWN] we should address him as a King, or perhaps call him "Your Worship"?

MR. BROWN [*scratching his head*]: It's a puzzle.

MRS. BROWN: I wouldn't hurt his feelings for anything.

MR. BROWN [*has an inspiration*]: Suppose we all bow very low and say, "All Hail, Father Christmas!"

MRS. BROWN [*considering*]: Yes, I believe that's the very thing. We'd better practice now, children. [*To* MR. B.] You pretend to be Father Christmas and come in at the door.

MR. BROWN: Right, oh! [*Exit.*]

[MRS. BROWN *arranges the children, telling them how to stand and speak. Enter* MR. BROWN, *slowly and with great assumed dignity.*]

CHILDREN [*bowing low and in awestruck voices*]: All Hail, Father Christmas!

MRS. BROWN [*with a sigh of relief*]: That will do splendidly. Now, we needn't worry about it any more, and there's time for another game—or would you like a song?

CHILDREN: {A song, Uncle!
Song, Mr. Brown!

MR. BROWN: All right. I'll sing you one.

[CHILDREN *sit at one side of stage with backs to door, in semi-circle; little ones cross-legged in front.* MRS. BROWN *sits at piano.* MR. BROWN *astride a chair. Sings "Dear Little Jammy Face" (or any children's song). Just after he has begun,* MR. CHALMERS *enters, hat in hand, wearing his spectacles, from piano side.* MRS. BROWN *nods and smiles, from piano. He is looking startled and embarrassed to see the crowd, but* MRS. B. *signals to him with one hand to lay down his coat and hat. He does so and advances to the piano awkwardly, but presently gets into the spirit of the song, beating time and joining in the chorus. Song over, the Browns shake hands with him—"So glad to see you, etc."*]

MR. BROWN: That's right to come in! We thought you'd like to see the children's fun and [*looking at his watch nervously*] you're just in time to join us in greeting the guest of the evening.

MR. CHALMERS: Oh—and who's that?

MR. BROWN [*proudly*]: Father Christmas.

MR. CHALMERS [*making a dash for his hat and coat*]: Er—you'll excuse me—but I had forgotten an appointment.

[*They try to detain him, expostulating, and while he hesitates a loud step and a jovial voice are heard approaching, singing:*]

"A jovial monk am I,

[*Enter* FATHER CHRISTMAS, *singing, at the door*]

Contented with my lot,
The world without this gate, I flout,
Nor care for it one jot.

"Shall I make life dull and dreary,
Because a somber garb I wear (ha, ha)
I've a heart that's light and cheery
And can afford to laugh at care.

Chorus

"A contented mind is a blessing kind
And a merry heart is a purse well lined;
So what care I, let the world go by,
For it's better far to laugh than cry."

CHILDREN [*shrieking with joy*]: Father Christmas! Father Christmas! [*They close around him with obvious delight. two little girls jump into his arms, boys hang onto his coat tails, clutch his legs, etc.*]

MR. AND MRS. BROWN [*horrified*]: Oh, children! [*They call some of them off and with* MR. CHALMERS *hand in hand, in line, they advance and bow low.*]

ALL: All Hail, Father Christmas!

FATHER CHRISTMAS: What's that?

[ALL *repeat.*]

FATHER CHRISTMAS [*shivering and turning up his coat collar*]: Mercy on us, but it is cold. I must have left the door open. [*Turning, he pretends to be going.*]

MR. AND MRS. BROWN [*spontaneously with hands out*]: Oh, Father Christmas, we're so glad to see you!

FATHER CHRISTMAS: Ha, ha! That's warmer. I feel more at home, now. [*To* MR. CHALMERS, *shaking his hand vigorously*] My good sir, I'm glad to see *you* here. You're looking better since the last time I saw you.

MR. CHALMERS [*with ponderous civility*]: You have the advantage of me, sir. I never saw you before, though once in my extreme youth I heard you in the chimney.

FATHER CHRISTMAS: Ha, ha, ha! Chimneys were chimneys in those days. I've had to advance with the times and learn to slip through an electric radiator! Well, children, we'd better get to business, eh? [*Suddenly and in mock sternness*] How many of you lay awake and watched for me last night?

ONE CHILD: I meant to, but I didn't know I had gone to sleep till I woke up.

SECOND CHILD: I thought I heard you coming into our room and shut my eyes very tight. Then I peeped a tiny bit, but it was only mother with a light.

ONE BOY: One big boy at school told me there was no such person as you, Father Christmas, and it was only kids who believed it. Now I'll tell him he was all wrong.

FATHER CHRISTMAS: Ha, ha, Charlie, you have the right eyes to see! There's always some big boy, and even some big grown-up people who see nothing where others see the most wonderful things. I know a man, an old man, now, and he hasn't seen the stars for years, he's been so busy looking for a gold mine. These big boys and big smart people aren't nearly as happy as you and I, eh?

MR. CHALMERS [*to himself*]: I was one of those big smart boys.

FATHER CHRISTMAS: You're feeling happier, now, Chalmers, old boy.

RAGGED GIRL [*from without, singing a Christmas carol alone. In the middle of the singing she is stopped by coughing.*]

MRS. BROWN [*looking out the window*]: Oh, the poor child! I must bring her in. [*Goes out. Returns leading the girl, who is clad in rags. The girl shrinks backward, dazzled by the light and the brightness.*]

ONE CHILD [*running forward kindly*]: Come and see our Kismas tee, ittle girl.

ANOTHER CHILD [*takes her by the hand to lead her to it*]: Oh, how cold your hands are!

FATHER CHRISTMAS [*tenderly*]: Let me warm her. [*He rubs her hands between his.*] Did you wonder if Father Christmas had forgotten you? Or that you had grown too big for him?

Why, I expected to meet you here to-night and [*whimsically*] I just slipped your party frock into my satchel! [*Produces white frock from his sack, shakes it out, and holds it out to her.*]

RAGGED GIRL [*clasping her hands*]: Oh [*in ecstasy*], for me?

MRS. BROWN: I'll help her to put it on this minute. Come, darling. [*Both exit.* MRS. BROWN'S *arm around girl's shoulder.*]

FATHER CHRISTMAS [*agitatedly feeling in all his pockets and over his person. Then in sack, which he finally turns inside out and shakes*]: Not another thing have I got and there's nothing on the tree for that poor child. I must fly off to my store at once. Children, I'll try to be back in time.

CHORUS OF CHILDREN'S VOICES: Don't go away, Father Christmas!

FIRST CHILD: Give her my toys.

SECOND CHILD: Give her mine.

SEVERAL CHILDREN: Give her ours. Give her mine.

MR. CHALMERS [*who has been talking quietly to* BROWN *and intently observing the scene, comes toward* FATHER CHRISTMAS. *He takes out an envelope from his inside pocket and drops one or two coins into it. Speaking very quietly and earnestly*]: May an old man be permitted to give one of his toys, too?

FATHER CHRISTMAS [*cheerful again*]: Hurrah! The SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS has come to my rescue again. She's always helping me out. But that was a narrow shave. [*While speaking, he puts the envelope on the tree and alters some of the names.*]

[*Re-enter* RAGGED GIRL, now dressed, and MRS. BROWN.]

FATHER CHRISTMAS [*resuming*]: Now you will see what Father Christmas has brought you. Mrs. Brown will help me, I know. [*Hands gifts from the tree to each of the children, with remarks, while* SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS *is discovered behind and above, waving her wand from the tree toward the children.* MR. CHALMERS *and* MR. BROWN *both go among the*

children, CHALMERS *delightfully interested and boyish.* RAGGED GIRL *gets her share of the gifts, and, last of all, the envelope. The children group around as she opens it and empties the money into her hand.*]

RAGGED GIRL [*in frightened surprise*]: Why, it's gold!

CHILDREN [*echo*]: Gold! Gold!

MR. CHALMERS [*solemnly*]: Yes, children, gold to you is wonderful, because of the toys and candy it can buy. To this poor girl it means food and warmth and a few comforts which she badly needs. To me it meant power and influence and selfish comfort, and the getting of gold was all I lived for. I actually grudged the time spent in a friendly call.

MR. BROWN: Oh, Chalmers, you weren't so bad as that!

MR. CHALMERS: I was becoming blind to all the things that make life worth living and I even thought the SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS was dead. [SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS *is heard laughing.*]

THE BROWNS AND BIGGER CHILDREN: What was that?

SMALL GIRL: I think it was like a fairy laughing.

MR. CHALMERS [*continuing*]: I thank you, my friends, for showing me my mistake and with your help, I will try to mend my ways. [*To the* CHILDREN] Will you promise that next Christmas you will all come and see my Christmas tree?

CHILDREN: Oh, yes! etc.

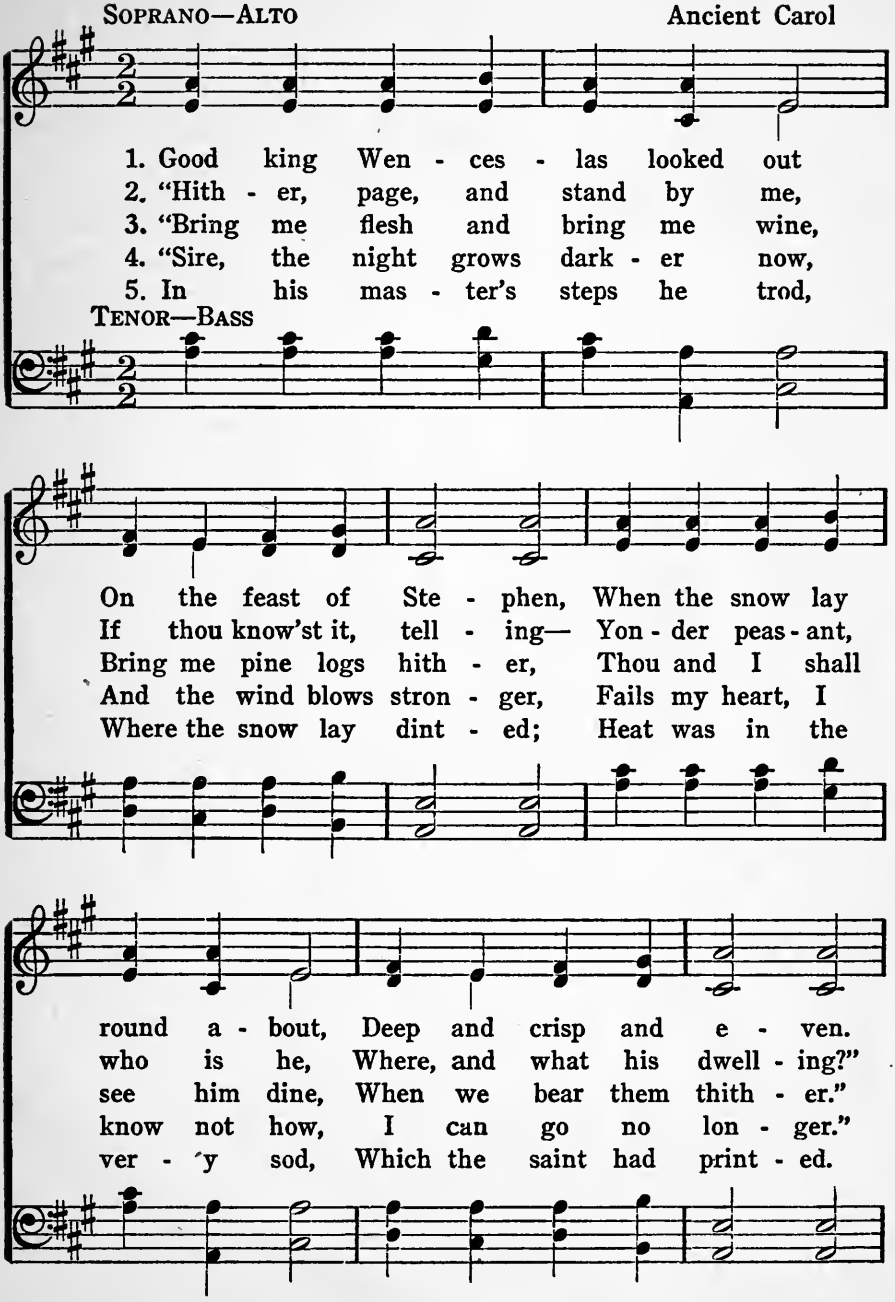
CHALMERS [*to* FATHER CHRISTMAS]: And you, too, Father Christmas? [*Bowing to him*] If you would honor me?

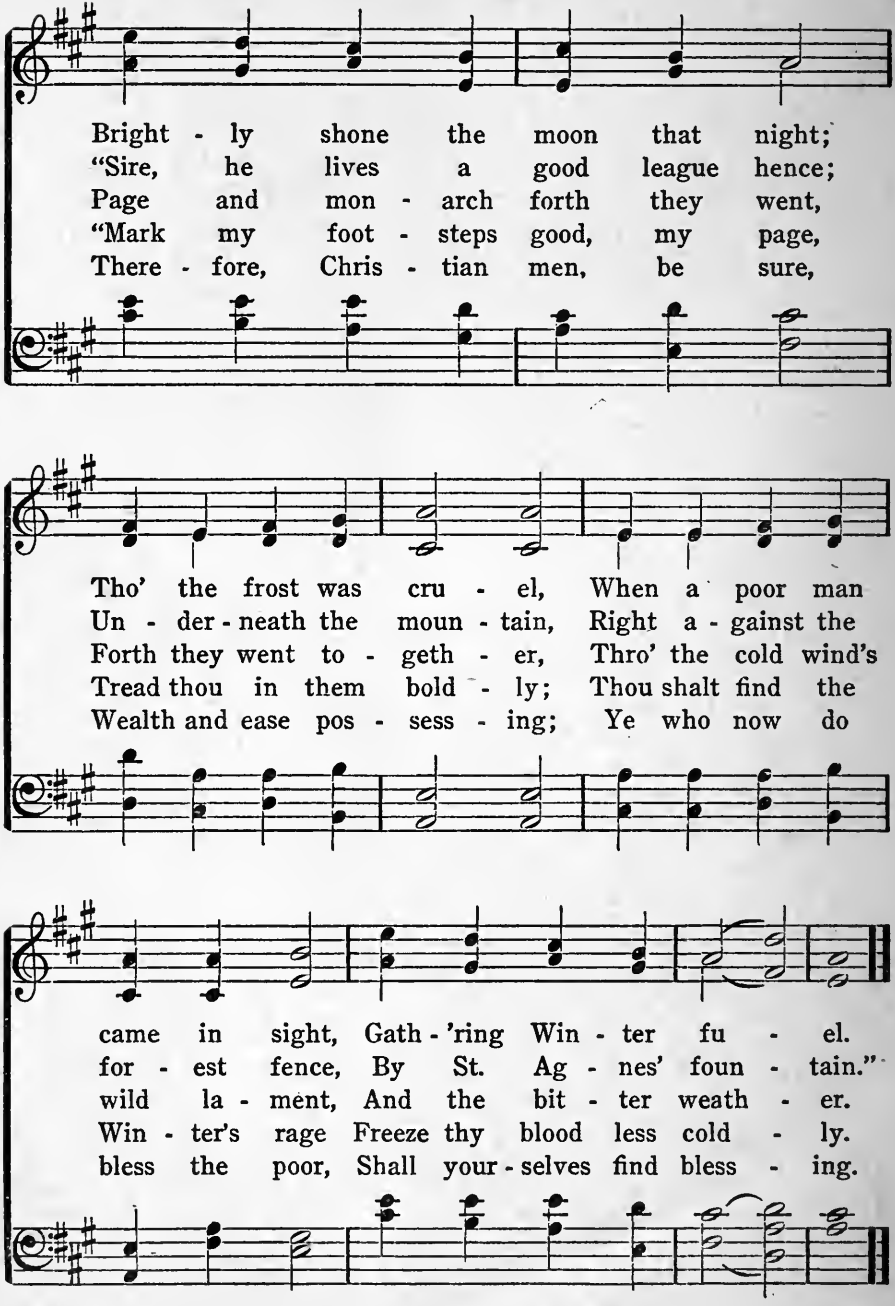
FATHER CHRISTMAS: Why, of course; and I know I shall find you a happier man. Fellowship, kindness, service for others: these are the currency of happiness. [*Nodding wisely*] Father Christmas, he knows. [*Singing, in which all join:*]

"A contented mind is a blessing kind
And a merry heart is a purse well lined;
So what care I, let the world go by,
For it's better far to laugh than cry."

CURTAIN

GOOD KING WENCESLAS

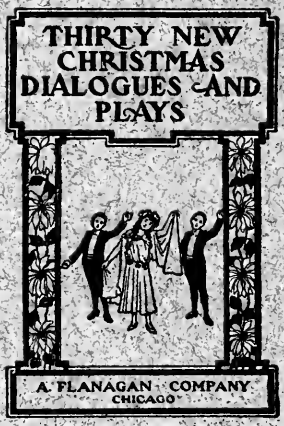

SOPRANO—ALTO
Ancient Carol
1. Good king Wen - ces - las looked out
2. "Hith - er, page, and stand by me,
3. "Bring me flesh and bring me wine,
4. "Sire, the night grows dark - er now,
5. In his mas - ter's steps he trod,
TENOR—BASS
On the feast of Ste - phen, When the snow lay
If thou know'st it, tell - ing— Yon - der peas - ant,
Bring me pine logs hith - er, Thou and I shall
And the wind blows stron - ger, Fails my heart, I
Where the snow lay dint - ed; Heat was in the
round a - bout, Deep and crisp and e - ven.
who is he, Where, and what his dwell - ing?"
see him dine, When we bear them thith - er."
know not how, I can go no lon - ger."
ver - y sod, Which the saint had print - ed.

Good King Wenceslas—Concluded

Bright - ly shone the moon that night;
"Sire, he lives a good league hence;
Page and mon - arch forth they went,
"Mark my foot - steps good, my page,
There - fore, Chris - tian men, be sure,
Tho' the frost was cru - el, When a poor man
Un - der - neath the moun - tain, Right a - gainst the
Forth they went to - geth - er, Thro' the cold wind's
Tread thou in them bold - ly; Thou shalt find the
Wealth and ease pos - sess - ing; Ye who now do
came in sight, Gath - 'ring Win - ter fu - el.
for - est fence, By St. Ag - nes' foun - tain."
wild la - ment, And the bit - ter weath - er.
Win - ter's rage Freeze thy blood less cold - ly.
bless the poor, Shall your - selves find bless - ing.

THIRTY NEW CHRISTMAS DIALOGUES AND PLAYS

By Clara J. Denton, Marie Irish, Laura R. Smith and others. 175 pages. Paper. Price, 30 cents.

A BOOK of thirty new, original, bright and clever Christmas dialogues and plays for children of all ages. The matter is divided into three parts: Primary, Intermediate, and Higher, there being about an equal number of plays under each division. Four or five of the dialogues are in verse and a few of the plays are interspersed with music.



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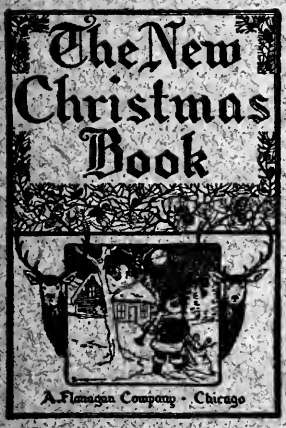

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